



## HISTORY OF

## BRIGHAM AND MARY BLANCHE ALEXANDER MURDOCH



Brigham Murdoch was born November 2, 1870, in Heber City, Utah. He was the second son of a family of seven, four boys and three girls, born to John Murray and Isabella Crawford Murdoch.

Brig's childhood was spent with loving parents, brothers, and sisters who were taught the principles of the gospel by example. The children were taught to work, to respect and love each other. They were accustomed to hardship and inconveniences by today's standards, but they were never lacking for food and clothing and shelter and love. They were taught to say their prayers and blessing on the food, and attended church regularly.

In the summer they worked on the farm with the crops and livestock, feeding pigs and chickens and milking cows. They maintained a "homeherd" of about one hundred ewes in the summer, which was merged with the range flock to go south in the winter because of the long winters in Heber Valley. While in their teens, Brig and his next-older brother James herded the two thousand head of sheep on the summer range in the mountains.

Brig attended Primary and was baptized August 8, 1881. In due time he was ordained a deacon and was chosen as first counselor to assist Frederick Crook, president of the deacons quorum. Fred later became bishop of Heber First Ward. They became lifelong friends. While a deacon, Brig was privileged to pass the sacrament during a conference presided over by President Wilford Woodruff. Brig was very impressed with Wilford Woodruff, as he looked so much like his dad.

The children attended schools in Heber. Brig spent one term attending a branch of the Brigham Young Academy, also in Heber. He was active in the Young Men's Mutual Association and participated in plays presented by the thespians group in most of the communities in the valley.

Social activities for young people also included dances and singing groups, and most of Brig's brothers and sisters loved music and could play musical instruments, and all of them loved singing. They were taught sewing, knitting, weaving, and poetry to add to the beauty of their home life.

During Brig's later school days, he met a girl he thought to be the most beautiful girl in the world. She was Mary Blanche Alexander, a popular girl and a talented piano player. She played for dances with various musical groups in the Heber Valley. Brig played the guitar, and they had many good times together. In Brig's own words, "Our good feelings about each other were mutual and our courtship was pleasant and happy." Blanche's parents were Charles Marsteller Alexander and Lovisa Comstock Snyder. Her mother was a fine seamstress and was also the first telephone operator in Heber City. Blanche was born February 16, 1873, in Midway, Wasatch County, Utah. She was baptized in August, 1883. Brig was ordained an elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood on December 14, 1891, and they were married in the Logan Temple on December 16, 1891. They lived in Heber City during the winter. In the spring, they moved to Park City, where Brig had worked in the mines previous to their marriage. They were very happy. Brig was working at good wages, and they were getting ahead. The future looked bright as he worked through summer and the expectation of the arrival of their first child became assured.

They planned for Blanche to return to her mother's home prior to the arrival of the baby so she could have good care for herself and the baby. Robert Rue was born November 16, 1892. He was named and given a blessing by his grandfather, John Murray Murdoch, who was at this time also a stake patriarch.

Living with Brig and Blanche in Park City was Brig's brother Robert (Boot), who also worked in the mines. Blanche's sister Lovella was a frequent visitor in their home, and a strong friendship developed between Boot and Lovella.

Shortly after Robert Rue was born, Brig contracted typhoid fever. He recovered in due time, but was unable to return to work for the remainder of the winter. As Brig recovered and gained sufficient strength, they moved into a part of their old home in Heber City, where there would be more room. They were comfortable and happy again. The baby was strong and healthy. When spring came, Brig was ready to go back to work at Park City at the same place. Blanche and Rue came in a few days. Springtime was beautiful, and they were so happy to be back together in their little home again.

They had been settled in their home only a short time when Brig came off the night shift to find his wife had been very ill all night. He could see that fever was developing. At times she would seem to get temporarily better and then get worse. As the fever continued to return, they decided it would be better for her to return to her parents in Heber, where she could be near her mother and receive better care. After returning to Heber, she gradually grew worse, and Brig was sent for. When he arrived, she did not recognize him. She would beg for her baby and would hug him so hard the family was afraid she might hurt him. Someone gave her a large ragdoll to hold. She was so ill she did not know the difference.

On June 22, 1893, Blanche passed away, leaving a loving husband and a seven-month-old son. She was buried in the Heber cemetery.

Robert (Boot) and Luella also contracted the disease and failed to recover. Within a period of three months, Brig had lost three people very near and dear to him. In Brig's words, "We can overcome our emotions, but it is hard to forget. Our baby who was seven months old also contracted the fever but with more skillful treatment he recovered. From that time and through the rest of my life it seemed as if some unseen power was my guest."

The baby Rue remained in the home of Blanche's parents, where he was given all the love and kindness that only sorrowing grandparents can give. This was to be his home for several years in his early life.

Brig returned to the mine in Park City, where he pondered his future. He was doing well there, but as the years went by a restlessness continued to grow. He recalled his father's experiences and hardships in the mines of Scotland. He was told of his Grandfather James Murdoch's early death in the gas-filled mineshaft, which left his grandmother, Wee Granny, a poor widow with seven children.

During the winter and spring of 1900, the Church secured a tract of land in the Big Horn Basin in Wyoming and was encouraging Church members to colonize it. Brig and Thomas, his brother, became interested and decided to take a look at it. Bishop Thomas Hicken and a neighbor, Robert Giles, were also going. All preparations were made to leave June 15, 1900.

At this time, their father, who was the stake patriarch, told them that as they were going on a long journey, he was impressed to give each of them a patriarchal blessing. He placed his hands on each of their heads and gave them a blessing. The brothers then bade their folks goodbye and started their journey. They did not take a copy of their blessing with them. Brig was now thirty and Tom was thirty-four. They arrived at the colony about June 25. There was a large number of wagons camped along the Grey Bull River. A canal had been started. The project was under the supervision of Apostle Owen Woodruff. Meetings were held and instructions and advice were given. It was announced there would be a dance held on a certain night. Since Brig had a

guitar and Tom a violin, they were asked to play for the dance. The dance was in the open, as there was not a building or floor to dance on, so they danced on the ground. Elder Woodruff joined in the dance and enjoyed it as much as anyone.

After looking over the land for two days, the Heberites decided not to locate there. The bishop remarked that there was nothing that looked pleasing to the eye. After the horses had rested for three days, they started their journey back to Heber, arriving in time to celebrate the Fourth of July.

Brig had taken a leave from his mining job in Park City and now returned to work. He was more restless than before. Something kept urging him to get out and get some land. That thought was on his mind most of the time.

Brig's sister, Margaret Ann, had married Lewis J. Hawkes on November 7, 1889, and they had acquired a farm in southern Idaho in an area called Horseshoe Flat, about three miles west of Drummond. They first lived at Franklin, Idaho. In company with Lewis's father, Joshua Hawkes, and several other men from Franklin, the group had located in that area about 1896. There was still land available for homesteading, but it was being settled rapidly. Canals had to be made and water brought to the land before it could be "proved upon."

Brig continued working at Park City. He had a good job and liked the boss he was working with. In late October, the urge to change prompted him to write his brother Tom, suggesting another trip, this time to Idaho. Tom answered that he was ready to go any time. A date was set, Brig took another day off, and they started for Idaho. They had a buckboard (heavy buggy), a team of horses, a camping outfit, and bedding. They had a good trip and arrived at their sister's house (Margaret Ann) a few days before election day. They liked the looks of the area much better than the Big Horn Basin they had visited earlier in the summer. They had a good visit with Margaret and Lewis.

They located land they could acquire and returned to Utah. During the winter of 1900-1901 they made preparations for returning to Idaho and setting up their homesteads.

The Oregon Short Line Railroad was completed as far as Rexburg, Idaho. On April 1, Brig and Tom arrived in Rexburg with two cars of livestock and farming equipment. En route to their land, they were caught in a snowstorm that lasted for several days. Their livestock was scattered, and it took them several more days to gather them up again.

At that time, most of Idaho's land was open to homesteading under the Homestead Act or the Carey Act, which permitted individuals to file on 160 acres of land and improve it with fences, buildings, cropping, and bringing irrigation water to the land within five years. Consequently, most of the Snake River Valley was being claimed by farmers, ranchers, business people, and speculators.

The land Brig and Tom acquired was in the Farnum district, south of the Fall River, about five or six miles south of what is now Ashton, Idaho, and about five miles west of Drummond.

Brig acquired the interests of a homesteader on 107 acres bordered on the north by the Fall River. It had a one-room log house. Tom homesteaded 160 acres, joining Brig on the south, and Hans Nielson, a Danish emigrant, on the west. These three bachelors were to spend many years together as neighbors and community builders.

Brig's one-room log house became headquarters for the three as they proceeded to improve their farms. Tom's homestead was open prairie with no buildings or water on it. Brig's home was about seventy-five yards from Fall River, which provided domestic water but no irrigation. Hans's

buildings were developed near the river downstream half a mile from Brig's.

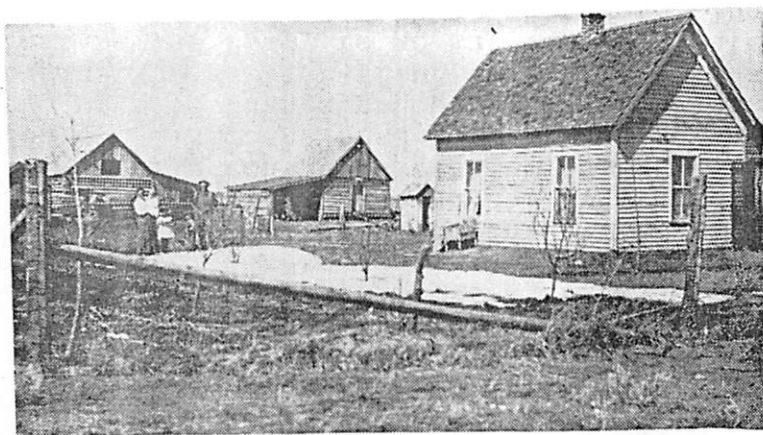
The first concern as a community was to build a canal to irrigate the farm as a final step to "proving up" on the homestead to qualify for ownership of the land. In 1896, a group of settlers from Franklin had located in Horseshoe Flat, a fairly level area with good soil. Surveys conducted by this group showed that water could be taken from Conant Creek by a long hillside canal to irrigate a large area, including the land Brig and Tom acquired. They filed on the water that year, and work was started on the canal.

As few homes were available on the new land, the settlers would return to Franklin in the winter and return in the spring to continue improving their land and working on the canal. Some homesteaders gave up and sold or traded their interests in the land to other settlers.

The work on the canal was paid for by issuing stock ownership in the canal. The wages were \$1.50 a day for a man and \$2.50 for a man with a team, for a ten-hour day. The canal was dug with plows and slip scrapers pulled by a team of horses. It was nine miles from the head of the canal to the terminal, where lateral ditches were extended to carry the water to the various farms. No water was taken out for irrigation above the terminal. The entire nine miles of main canal was on a steep hillside covered with bushes, trees, and rocks.

When Brig and Tom arrived in April, 1901, the canal was underway with much yet to be done. Each settler had to build a home to live in first, together with corrals and some fences where they had livestock. The waist-high natural grasses provided summer feed for livestock and winter feed where it could be harvested for hay. Little farming could be done without irrigation water.

The homesteaders camped near where the canal was being dug, in tents and wagons. Some of the men's wives were with them to cook and help any way they could.



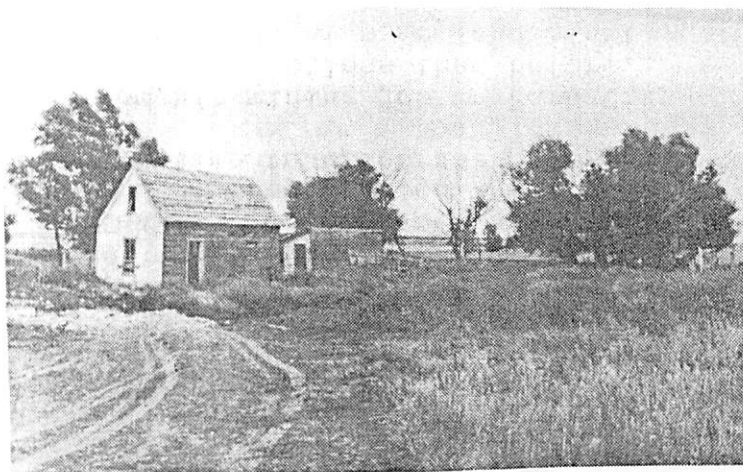
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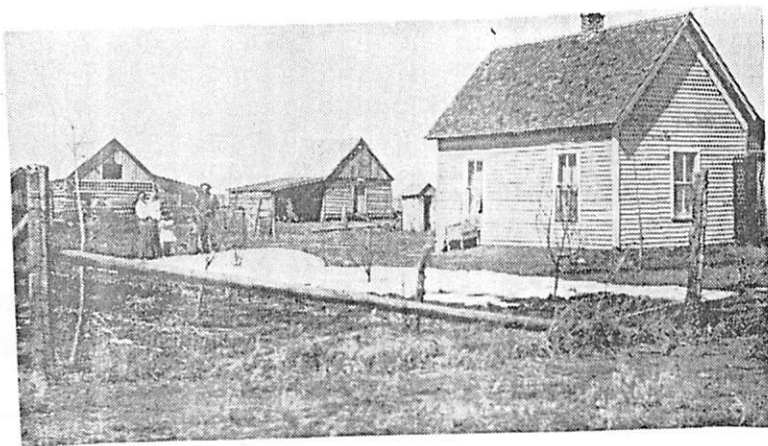
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